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ABSTRACT

The highly rated television program series, "All in the Family," was used to test the relationship between attitudes espoused by televised characters and attitudes held by viewers of this type of television programing. On the basis of survey questionnaires, it was condluded that people who hold dogmatic and, especially, racist beliefs find reinforcement of their opinions in the program's character, Archie Bunker (an espouser of dogmatic, racist ideas). Conversely, audience members who are open-minded (as tested) find Archie "likeable" while disagreeing with his opinions. The female characters in the program series elicit relatively neutral responses. (CH)

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THE EVALUATION OF DOGMATIC TELEVISION CHARACTERS BY DOGMATIC VIEWERS: 'IS ARCHIE BUNKER A CREDIBLE SOURCE?'

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PROBLEM

The latest addition to network television programming has been the advent of shows depicting people as they "really are." As evidenced by the three most well known, and highly rated shows of this type, "All in the Family," "Maude," and "Sanford and Son," [1] these shows have decided to strip away the flat undimensional characterizations of the past and instead, present rounded, opinionated, straight-talking, no-holds-barred, controversial characters.

The original program, "All in the Family," has been on the air for two full seasons, "Sanford and Son" has been aired for about a year and a half, and "Maude" is completing its first year. All three shows have been written and produced by Norman Lear, in conjunction with Bud Yorkin. The philosophy upon which these three situation comedies have been based has recently been verbalized by Lear:

> "We build strong characters. They do things that people care about. When you care about something the funny things are that much funnier. When you object to something, you object that much harder. ...you can empathize with the characters. Then, the laughter is at what is funny to you, and the poignant moments are deeply felt."[2]

The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance received in collecting and analyzing data for this paper from his Mass Communication Research class at the University of Georgia and his student research assistants Cathy Brown and Edwin S. Bufkin.

Lear feels that he has moved the viewing public beyond the "vast wasteland" of previous television programming which handles noncontroversial topics in a noncontroversial manner. In his programs he emphasizes that, "...intelligent adults are entitled to have the problems of intelligent adults."[3] Some people in the broadcasting industry, as well as many social scientists, do not appreciate Lear's efforts, however.

A Newsweek article denounced Archie (a character in "All in the Family") as "...the confluence of everything that fear and ignorance can do to a man."[4] The New York Times wrote, "The most damning tirade has emanated from Laura Hobson whose 1947 novel, "Gentlemen's Agreement," dealt with anti-Semitism. Miss Hobson is furous over the notion that Archie is likable, even lovable. ...Miss Hobson wants her bigot to be totally hateful, so the message is clear: hate me, hate my dogma."[5]

Likewise, spokesman within the black community have been especially upset by the characterizations portrayed on "All in the Family." Black psychiatrist Alvin Poussaint of Harvard believes that it is a "dangerous show". "It's dangerous not only in terms of how it might be influencing white attitudes but also because it does have many blacks laughing at the kind of bigotry and racism Archie expresses. It's an unreal show--unreal both in its portrayal of the true nature of many Archie-type white people and its depiction of just how much insult

black people today will tolerate."[6] Another black educator concurs, calling "All in the Family" "...institutionalized bigotry 52 weeks a year. ...perpetuates white racist attitudes and functions only to amuse whites and subordinate black people and make them '1972 Amos 'n Andys'."[7]

Obviously, programming epitomized by "All in the Family" cannot both lead the public out of the "wasteland" as well as "institutionalize bigotry." The following study attempts to resolve this conflict.

CONCEPTUAL BASE

Any deleterious effect the show might have upon the public revolves around the statements made by the show's characters. If the characters are viewed as "similar to the viewer" and / or are "likeable," then it is inferred that their statements are apt to be favorably accepted by the viewing public. An important consideration is the psychological framework of the viewer, i.e., his susceptibility to accept statements made by a television character.

The psychological concept at issue in this instance is the dogmatic, or open-closed, mind. Rokeach has delineated the basic characteristic that defines the extent a person is classified as either high or low dogmatic, "...the extent to which the person can receive, evaluate, and act on relevant information received from the outside on its own intrinsic

merits, unencumbered by irrelevant factors in the situation arising from within the person or from the outside."[8] The closed-minded or high dogmatic individual is characterized as being less able to react to the merits of a message apart from personal habits, beliefs, ego needs, etc. which are irrelevant to the message itself. "The more open one's belief system, the more should evaluating and acting on information proceed independently on its own merits, in accord with the inner structural requirements of the situation."[9]

Likewise, a high dogmatic or closed-minded individual would not clearly differentiate his reaction to information received and the source of that information. As Rokeach states, "...the more closed the belief system, the more difficult should it be to distinguish between information received about the world and information received about the source."[10] This contention has received support.

Powell (1962)[11] found that the more open is an individual's belief system, the greater is his ability to distinguish between message source and message content and to judge each on its intrinsic merits. Harvey and Hays (1972)[12] found that high-dogmatic subjects agreed more with the communication when given by the high-authority source than by the low-authority source. Low-dogmatics were not differentially influenced by the authority of the communicator. This is clear evidence of the link made

by the high-dogmatic between his evaluation of the message and the source.

Thus, the first working hypothesis for the present study is: H_1--For high-dogmatic viewers, the television characters with which they "agree" will also be the characters which they "like," while no trend should develop for low-dogmatic viewers.

Also, following from previous research which has shown that high-dogmatic individuals are less tolerant of belief-discrepant information than low-dogmatic persons (Kleck and Wheaton 1967)[13], the seond working hypothesis was formulated:

> H_2--For high-dogmatic viewers, the television characters with which they do not "agree" will also be the characters they do not "like", while no trend should develop for low-dogmatic viewers.

Negative societal effects would result from having high-dogmatic viewers accept the bigoted and stereotypic thinking advocated by "Archie Bunker," a highly dogmatic character in "All in the Family." Thus, "Archie Bunker" would be viewed as "similar" by high-dogmatics, would be "liked", and his "message" would either further reinforce prior beliefs or would be newly "agreed with." A large group of previous findings would support this process.

The Handbook of Social Psychology (1969) states that,

> "There is a considerable body of evidence that a person is influenced by a persuasive message to the extent that he perceives it as coming from a source similar to himself. Presumably the receiver, to the extent that he perceives the source to be like himself in diverse characteristics, assumes that they also share common needs and goals. The

> receiver might therefore conclude that what the source is urging is good for 'our kind of people,' and thus changes his attitude accordingly."[14]

Stotland and Patchen (1961) concur based on their findings. Their study points to the fact that subjects empathize with and adopt the feelings and opinions of others to the extent that these others have been represented as similar to themselves. They state, "It was found that those low in prejudice at the first administration became more prejudiced but only if they were told the case history was about someone like themselves."[15] These findings would tend to add credence to the "worst fears" voiced by the show's critics.

METHOD

A random sample of adults in Athens, Georgia (N=265) were used as respondents in a personal interview administered by ten personally trained interviewers during Spring Quarter, 1972. The sample was obtained through a systematic selection of households contained within randomly selected city blocks.

After determining that the respondent is a viewer of "All in the Family," he was asked to respond to two sets of Likert-type statements, "Strongly Agree With"--"Strongly Disagree With" and "Strongly Like"--"Strongly Dislike," for each of the five main characters in the program, Archie (the father), Mike (the son-in-law), Edith (the mother), Gloria (the daughter), and Lionel (the black neighbor). (See Appendix)

The subjects then responded to the Short Form Dogmatism Scale,[16] and to questions asking for education, occupation, income, and age. (See Appendix) In analyzing the findings, t-test statistics were used in testing the differences in degree of "Liking" and "Agreement" between dogmatic groups for each "All in the Family" character.

FINDINGS

The high-dogmatic individuals "agreed with" the character "Archie" to a significantly greater degree than did either the medium or low dogmatic individuals; however, they "Liked Archie" to a significantly greater degree than only the medium-dogmatics. The low-dogmatic individuals, on the other hand, "Agreed with Mike and Lionel" to a significantly greater degree than did the middle or high dogmatic individuals, and "Liked Mike and Lionel" to a significantly greater degree than did the high-dogmatic individuals. (See Table 1)

Differences between subjects on their ratings of "Edith" and "Gloria" were generally not significant. Significant differences did occur between high and low dogmatics concerning their "Agreement with Edith and Gloria". High-dogmatic individuals "Agreed with Edith" and low-dogmatic individuals "Agreed with Gloria." (See Table 1)

The highest range of responses were found in response to "Agreement with Archie" (2.2-4.0). Responses to this question

were analyzed by demographic categories. The "type" of individual "Agreeing with Archie" to a significantly greater degree was a: high-dogmatic, low educated, low status occupation, low income, older, female. (See Table 2)

On the whole, a majority of the mean evaluations were on the positive side of the rating scale. Only the "Agreement with Archie" responses by middle and low dogmatic individuals averaged on the negative side of the rating scale.

ANALYSES

The findings show support for both hypotheses. High-dogmatic individuals were high in"Agreement and Liking of Archie." Likewise, high-dogmatic individuals displayed a relative lack of "Agreement with Mike and Lionel" while also expressing a significantly lower degree of "Liking Mike and Lionel" when compared to low-dogmatic individuals. The findings were mixed for "Edith" and "Gloria". The high-dogmatic individuals "Liked Gloria" although they were not in"Agreement with Gloria."

On the other hand, low-dogmatic individuals, although low in "Agreement with Archie," were still high in their "Liking of Archie." On the whole, low-dogmatic individuals did not differentiate their degree of "Liking" a character even though they did differentiate in their degree of "Agreement" with the characters.

A viewer profile, sharing a similar demographic profile to "Archie," is significantly in "Agreement with Archie" to a greater degree than viewers not sharing a similar demographic

profile to "Archie." If properly interpreted, "Archie" is depicted as a high-dogmatic, low educated, low status occupational, middle to lower income, and middle-aged. Only the fact that females "Agreed" more with "Archie" than did males deviates from the demographic profile of "Archie."

In general, the television characters, "Gloria" and"Edith", who do not espouse a definite and consistent opinion or open-closed-mindedness are the characters which are not differentiated by the respondents. Except for a few instances, "Gloria" and "Edith," are equally "Liked" and "Agreed With."

CONCLUSIONS

The producers of "All in the Family" have achieved their goals. They have presented the viewing public with characters with which viewers can identify, both affectively and cognitively. Undoubtedly, this has led to the show's great success. However, the critics have also been correct in their statements.

Clearly, the character "Archie" is perceived quite favorably by viewers similar in beliefs and demographics, to "Archie." Because of the inability of these individuals to differentiate source and message, there is a high probability that "Archie" is used as a credible source and that this "racist" message is favorably accepted.

This potential to use "Archie" as a credible source is a present and real danger when one accepts the process in which

Credibility is conferred upon a source. Miller (1966) states:

> "...it should be stressed that the values taken by all variables determining source credibility are assigned by the audience members, the receivers of the communication. Their preceptions are paramount: in this respect, no communicator ever possesses source credibility; it is conferred upon him by his listeners. To be sure, it is assumed that certain objective characteristics, or attributes, of the source increase the probability that credibility will be conferred, but this assumption is dependent upon the attitudes and beliefs of audience members."[17]

Not only does an individual choose a source that is perceived to be highly credible but, especially for a high-dogmatic individual, there is the increased danger of having a cycle of increased liking and agreement occur over a period of time concerning their perception of "Archie." Sampson and Insko (1964)[18] have clearly documented that their subjects not only changed their judgments so as to increase their similarity to the judgments of another person who was well liked, but also changed them so as to decrease their similarity to those of another person who was disliked. In other words, the potential for "liking" and "agreement" polarization by high-dogmatic individuals is highly probable through continued exposure to "Archie" on "All in the Family."

While low-dogmatic viewers do "Agree" with highly opinionated, but less dogmatic characters in "All in the Family," they do not concurrently dislike the character with which they disagree, as hypothesized. However, the author feels that a polar-

ized affective reaction could develop on the part of low-dogmatic individuals if they begin to feel that "Archie" is presented too sympathetically to the audience. Further longitudinal research should tap this phenomenon.

In conclusion, the author feels that critics of "All in the Family" are justified in their criticism. The show does increase viewer interest as inferred from the show's ratings, but it does this at the expense of polarizing a portion of the viewing public psychologically least capable of coping with the overwhelming social problems of our society at this time.

"Agreement" with and "Liking" of "All in the Family" Characters by all Respondents

Table #1
(N=265)

CONCEPT	MEAN (1-most favorable) (5-least favorable)			SIGNIFICANCE OF t-STATISTICS		
	High Dog (n=44)	Mid Dog (n=160)	Low Dog (n=61)	Hi & Lo	Hi & Mid	Mid & Lo
Agreement with "Archie:	2.2	3.4	4.0	.001	.001	.001
Liking "Archie"	1.8	2.2	2.1	n.s.	.01	n.s.
Agreement with "Mike"	3.0	2.8	2.3	.001	n.s.	.05
Liking "Mike"	2.7	2.4	2.2	.02	.05	n.s.
Agreement with "Edith"	2.5	2.6	2.9	.05	n.s.	n.s.
Liking "Edith"	2.1	2.1	2.1	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Agreement with "Gloria"	2.9	2.6	2.5	.10	n.s.	n.s.
Liking "Gloria"	2.2	2.3	2.3	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Agreement with "Lionel"	2.9	2.6	2.4	.02	.05	.05
Liking "Lionel"	2.8	2.2	2.2	.001	.001	n.s.

Demographic Profile Respondents

and their "Agreement with Archie"

Table #2
(N=265)

CONCEPT	"Agreement with Archie" MEAN (1-most favorable) (5-least favorable)		SIGNIFICANCE t-STATISTIC
	High	Low	
Dogmatism[1]	2.2 (n=44)	4.0 (n=61)	.001
Education[2]	3.7 (n=149)	2.9 (n=92)	.001
Occupation[3]	3.9 (n=47)	2.5 (n-37)	.001
Income[4]	3.6 (n=141)	3.1 (n=94)	.01
Age[5]	3.0 (n=43)	3.6 (n=96)	.02
	Male:	Female:	
Sex	3.6 (n=127)	3.2 (n=114)	.02

[1] High (+10 to +30), Low (-10 to -30)

[2] High (Some college or high), Low (High school or less)

[3] High (80 or higher on North-Hatt Scale), Low (59 or below on North-Hatt Scale)

[4] High ($10,000 or higher), Low ($9,999 or lower)

[5] High (51 years or older), Low (30 years or younger)

FOOTNOTES

[1]Nielsen ratings for the last week in November, 1972 had all three shows in the top five most popular shows on television. During that week, "All in the Family" was in first place, "Maude" was in fourth place, and "Sanford and Son" was fifth.

[2]Lawrence Laurent, "Popular TV shows Focus on Visceral Involvement," Atlanta-Constitution, Feb. 4, 1973, p. 19-F

[3]Ibid.

[4]"Family Fun: CBS's irreverent new situation comedy," Newsweek, March 15, 1971, p. 68.

[5]Arnold Hano, "Can Archie Bunker Give Bigotry a Bad Name?" New York Times, March 12, 1972, p. 33.

[6]Charles L. Sanders, "Is Archie Bunker the Real White American?" Ebony, (June, 1972), p. 190.

[7]"Another Blast by Brown", Broadcasting, (May 29, 1973), p. 41.

[8]Milton Rokeach, The Open and Closed Mind, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1960), p. 57

[9]Ibid., p. 58.

[10]Ibid., p. 58.

[11]Frederic Powell, "Open-and Closed-Mindedness and the Ability to Differentiate Source and Message," Journal of Abnormal Social Psychology, 65 (1962), pp. 61-64

[12]John Harvey and Daniel Hays, "Effect of Dogmatism and Authority of the Source of Communication Upon Persuasion," Psychological Reports, 30 (1972), pp. 119-122

[13]R. Kleck and J. Wheaton, "Dogmatism and Responses to Opinion-Inconsistent Information," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 5 (1967), pp. 249-252

[14]William McGuire, "The Nature of Attitudes and Attitude Change, "Found in Lindzey and Aronson (Ed.), The Handbook of Social Psychology, (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1969), Vol. III, p. 187.

[15]Ezra Stotland and Martin Patchen, "Identification and Changes in Prejudice and in Authoritarianism," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 62:2 (1961), p. 256

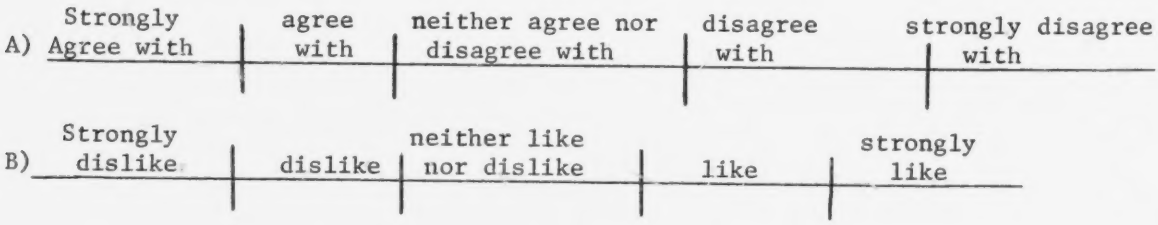
[16]Verling Troldahl and Frederic Powell, "A Short-Form Dogmatism Scale for Use in Field Studies," Social Forces, 44 (1965), pp. 211-214. The 10-item scale was used in this study. The reliability suffers with the 10-item scale (.66) but was used for economic reasons. The authors warn that, "If one uses these shorter versions, one should be aware that the relationships one finds between dogmatism and other variables will be lower than one would have obtained if one had used a more precise measure of dogmatism because of chance error in one's dogmatism scores." (p.214). This point should be kept in mind when analyzing the findings.

[17]Gerald R. Miller, Speech Communication: A Behavioral Approach, (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1966), p. 39.

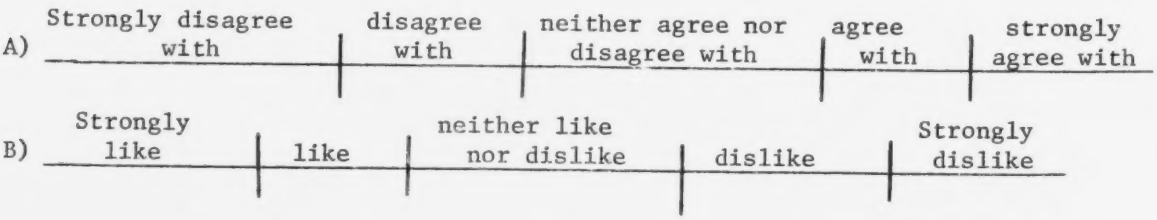
[18]Edward E. Sampson and Chester A. Insko, "Cognitive Consistency and Performance in the Autokinetic Situation," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 58 (1964), pp. 184-192.

Below indicate how you personally rate each individual character in "All in the Family." Please circle the statement which most closely states your feelings. Please read each statement carefully.

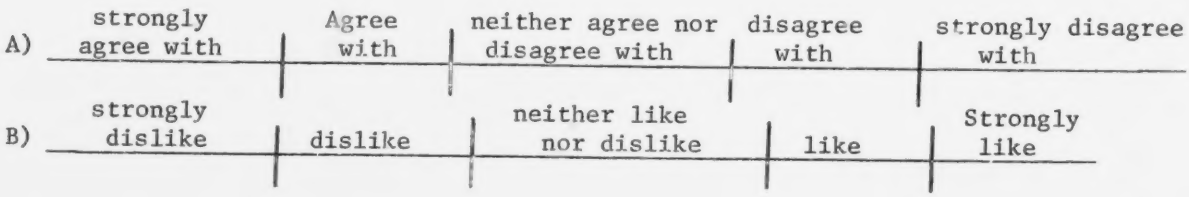
Archie (the father)



Mike (the son-in-law)



Edith (the mother)



Gloria (the daughter)

A) Strongly disagree with | disagree with | neither agree nor disagree with | agree with | Strongly agree with

B) Strongly like | like | neither like nor dislike | dislike | Strongly dislike

Lionel (the black neighbor)

A) Strongly agree with | Agree with | neither agree nor disagree with | disagree with | Strongly disagree with

B) strongly dislike | dislike | neither like nor dislike | like | strongly like

Now we would like to ask you some general types of questions. Please be as honest as possible in answering the questions and answer with the first response that comes to your mind.

First, decide whether you agree or disagree with the statement, and then decide how strongly you agree or disagree and circle that response.

1. In this complicated world of ours the only way we can know what's going on is to rely on leaders or experts who can be trusted.

Agree	or	Disagree
1. Agree a little		4. Disagree a little
2. Agree on the whole		5. Disagree on the whole
3. Agree very much		6. Disagree very much

2. My blood boils whenever a person stubbornly refuses to admit he's wrong.

Agree	or	Disagree
1. Agree a little		4. Disagree a little
2. Agree on the whole		5. Disagree on the whole
3. Agree very much		6. Disagree very much

3. There are two kinds of people in this world: those who are for truth and those who are against the truth.

Agree	or	Disagree
1. Agree a little		4. Disagree a little
2. Agree on the whole		5. Disagree on the whole
3. Agree very much		6. Disagree very much

4. Most people just don't know what's good for them.

Agree	or	Disagree
1. Agree a little		4. Disagree a little
2. Agree on the whole		5. Disagree on the whole
3. Agree very much		6. Disagree very much

5. Of all the different philosophies which exist in this world, there is probably only one which is correct.

Agree	or	Disagree
1. Agree a little		4. Disagree a little
2. Agree on the whole		5. Disagree on the whole
3. Agree very much		6. Disagree very much

6. The highest form of government is a democracy and the highest form of democracy is a government run by those who are most intelligent.

Agree	or	Disagree
1. Agree a little		4. Disagree a little
2. Agree on the whole		5. Disagree on the whole
3. Agree very much		6. Disagree very much

7. The main thing in life is for a person to want to do something important.

Agree	or	Disagree
1. Agree a little		4. Disagree a little
2. Agree on the whole		5. Disagree on the whole
3. Agree very much		6. Disagree very much

8. I'd like it if I could find someone who would tell me how to solve my personal problems.

Agree	or	Disagree
1. Agree a little		4. Disagree a little
2. Agree on the whole		5. Disagree on the whole
3. Agree very much		6. Disagree very much

9. Most of the ideas which get printed nowadays aren't worth the paper they are printed on.

Agree	or	Disagree
1. Agree a little		4. Disagree a little
2. Agree on the whole		5. Disagree on the whole
3. Agree very much		6. Disagree very much

10. Man on his own is a helpless and miserable creature.

Agree	or	Disagree
1. Agree a little		4. Disagree a little
2. Agree on the whole		5. Disagree on the whole
3. Agree very much		6. Disagree very much

Now we'd like to ask you a few final questions about yourself. Remember, your answers will remain anonymous and are confidential.

Education: Circle highest level completed by the head of the household.

a. less than high school
b. high school graduate and/or technical school
c. some college or college graduate
d. post-graduate

Occupation of head of household: _____

Annual Household income: Circle one

a. $5,999 or less
b. $6,000 or $9,999
c. $10,000 to $14,999
d. More than $15,000

Age: Circle one

a. younger than 21
b. 21 to 30
c. 31 ro 40
d. 41 to 50
e. 51 to 60
f. over 60